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PETER'S EARLY TEACHINGS.

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When Jesus died, the Christian Religion had no outward form or organization. During his life He taught new truths, set up new ideals, awakened new aspirations and established new hopes; but he did not organize his followers into a Society separate and distinct from Judaism. After the Resurrection, during the forty days, He continued his instruction on points bearing especially on the nature of the Heavenly Kingdom.

The process of giving an external organization to Christianity may be said to have begun on the day of Pentecost. This process was a gradual one—was indeed a growth. In this growth we can easily distinguish five phases: (1) a doctrinal growth, i. e., a growth in the Apostles' understanding of Christianity; (2) a numerical growth, i. e., an increase in the number of those who held Christian beliefs; (3) a separative growth, i. e., a process by which the Christians were expelled from the Jewish body and organized into a new and distinct body; (4) a structural growth, i. e., a process by which this new Christian body developed within itself its own functions and its own organs; (5) a dispersive growth, i. e., a process by which the Christian society not only came into existence, but also reproduced itself in every part of the Roman Empire.

Thus there was a growth in the individual; from one individual to another; a separation of these individuals into a class; structural growth within the class; a multiplication of the class throughout the world. These processes were, of course, interdependent, and each was in part the effect and in part the cause of all the others.

The doctrinal growth was from Peter, through Stephen to Paul and John. It has thus its four stages; Petrine, Stephanic, Pauline and Johannine. This paper will treat of the Petrine stage so far as recorded in the Book of Acts.

Peter was a Jew. He shared in the Jewish hopes and prejudices, conformed to the Jewish ritual and lived a Jewish life. But he came under the influence and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, became persuaded of his Messiahship, and looked for the immediate establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. In character, this Kingdom was to be, first of all, holy, based on repentance, on ceasing to do evil and learning to do good. In form, this Kingdom was to be earthly and Jewish. Its capital and throne were to be in Jerusalem, and Jesus was to be its King. It was to be conducted according to the principles taught by Jesus in his discourses, his parables and his life. Its fruitage to the Jews would be liberty, peace, prosperity. It would elicit the homage of all the nations of the earth, and confer upon them the benefits of its own excellence.

The crucifixion dispersed all these expectations of Peter, and overwhelmed him with despair. He resolved to resume his old work of fishing. But the resurrection, the intercourses and meditations of the forty days, the ascension, and the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, were events whose logic reset his views. This is evident from the speech that he makes on the Day of Pentecost which in substance was as follows: "This phenomena is not drunkenness, but the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy. The Messianic Days have come. The Spirit is poured out on all flesh, on all classes of Jewish people, young and old, men and women, bond and free, and not on a few individuals as heretofore. But the Messianic Days bring not only inspiration, they bring destruction also. Catastrophies in heaven and on earth will follow, blood and fire and vapor of smoke, the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the day of the Lord come." What do these words mean? Has Peter in mind the destruction of Jerusalem? or the destruction of the Jewish State and Nation? It was not possible for him at this time to think of such a thing. The prophecy of Joel is quoted in full because it contains the prediction that the Messiah at his coming will confer blessings on those prepared to receive him, and will send destruction on those who refuse to receive him. The meaning is the same as that of John the

Baptist when he says: "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire, whose fan is in his hand thoroughly to cleanse his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into his garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire." The Messiah, however, has appeared. This was Jesus of Nazareth, whom God approved by mighty works. The nation slew him. But God raised him from the dead and caused him to ascend to His right hand in heaven. All this was according to the counsel and foreknowledge of God, was predicted by the Psalmist David and witnessed by the Apostles themselves. The dire conclusion is that the Jewish nation has crucified, in the person of Jesus, its Lord and Messiah.

Peter has not ceased to be a Jew. But he is a Jew who believes that the Messiah has already come; that the Nation, not being prepared for Him, killed Him, and that for this reason He has, for the present, gone back to heaven. This announcement caused the wildest consternation. The multitudes cried: "Brethren, what shall we do?" That is: How shall we avert the consequences of our unpreparedness for the Messiah and our consequent rejection and crucifixion of Him? How shall we as a nation escape the catastrophies predicted in Joel's prophecy just quoted?

They are commanded to do two things: (1) repent ye, and (2) be baptized every one of you into the name of Jesus, the Messiah. Peter does not use the word repentance in the modern metaphysico-theological sense. He has not learned to resolve moral character into its constituent elements and to find that its quality depends on some one thing such as the intent or purpose of the soul. He cannot therefore mean to tell these people to change their purpose, their intent, their mind in life. Repentance to Peter means much the same as it did to John the Baptist. And John, in the specific instructions given to the people, the tax gatherers and the soldiers, has given us a clear conception of what he meant by repentance. It is a resolution looking toward reformation of conduct in the outward life. John baptized "unto repentance," i. e., with a view to reformation of outward behavior. Peter's meaning is the same. He tells the Jews that they must resolve to cease from their wicked doings and to give scrupulous

obedience to the law, as faithful Jews. That was one thing they must do. Then they were to be baptized into the name of Jesus, upon the basis of their conviction and avowal that He was the Messiah. He requires, therefore, the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah, and a formal expression of this acceptance by baptism.

The repentance, the naming of Jesus as Messiah, and the baptism into this name, were with a view to two objects, the remission of sins and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. Remission of sins is here used in its objective and not in its subjective sense. Peter is not thinking of that divine act in which God acquits man of sin. He is thinking rather of averting the calamitous consequences of sinning, and he has a special series of calamities in his mind. He is not thinking of the deterioration of character consequent upon sinning, or of eternal punishment in the world beyond. He has in mind the second part of Joel's prophecy which he has just quoted. He is referring to the fearful destruction with which the Messiah will destroy that part of the Jewish nation which will be unprepared for Him at his coming. It is in view of these calamities that they had asked the question. It is in part in order to avert these that he replies.

The other consequence of repentance, faith and baptism will be the bestowal of the Holy Ghost, that is, the fulfilment of the first part of Joel's prophecy. He confirms this statement by reminding them that the promise belongs to them as a nation, and to their descendants, whether they still live in the land of promise or have been scattered afar off.

Shortly after this, Peter addresses the multitude that had assembled in Solomon's Porch upon the healing of the lame man. The meaning of this address is similar to that of the address made on the Day of Pentecost. It has in it, however, one passage that is new, viz.: "Repent ye, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord and that he may send the Messiah who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus; whom the Heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things." Repentance, turning again, blotting out of sin, are prerequisite and

upon them is conditioned the coming of the seasons of refreshing. These seasons of refreshing are described as those in which God will have sent again the Messiah, even Jesus. But the Messiah cannot be sent before the restoration of all things. It is indeed necessary for the Heaven to receive Him until that time. Restoration of all things means repentance, turning again and blotting out of sin. In this consists the force of Peter's appeal. You crucified the Messiah because of your sins. The Messiah went back to Heaven after the resurrection because of your sins. His reception in Heaven must continue while you are in your sins. He would come again immediately were it not for your sins: Repent ye therefore and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out that so the Messiah may come back to earth, bringing seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

It will be noticed that the exhortations of the second address are given from a point of view different from that of the exhortations of the first address. In the first address the main object in view is to avert the destruction which the Messiah will inflict on those unprepared for Him. In the second address, the main object in view is to secure the speedy return of the Messiah. This accounts for the different ways in which sins are spoken of in the two addresses. In the first it is "remission of sins." In the second it is "sins blotted out." In one it is deliverance from the penalty of sin, in the other it is obliterating the sin itself.

On the following day Peter addresses the Sanhedrin, and makes use of the following expression: "And in none other is there salvation; for neither is there any other name under Heaven that is given among men wherein we must be saved." , 'We' here refers to the Jewish people, and "salvation" and "saved" mean the Messianic deliverance which the Jews as a nation hoped for. The import of this address is that Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Sanhedrin had crucified, was the true Messiah, the only Messiah which the Nation would ever have, that God had raised Him from the dead and that in his name the lame man was healed.

Sometime afterwards Peter again addresses the Sanhedrin and says in closing: "Him as Prince and Saviour did God

exalt at his right hand to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins." That is, God raised Jesus, who was a Prince and Saviour, unto his right hand in order to give to Israel time and opportunity for repentance and forgiveness. Rather than destroy the Nation at once because of its rejection of the Messiah, God had raised the Messiah unto his right hand in order that the Nation might be brought to repentance and through repentance to the forgiveness of sins.

Recapitulating the four addresses of Peter recorded in the first part of the Acts, we learn, according to the above exposition :

- 1, That Peter was a true and faithful Jew.
2. That in his mind the Messianic Kingdom was earthly and political, but based on pure morality and fervent piety. The benefits of the Kingdom were to be in part worldly and in part spiritual. The Holy Spirit was to be poured out on all classes of Jews. On the other hand, the Messiah was to destroy with a terrible destruction the immoral, the impious and the hostile to himself among the nation.
3. The Messiah had already come, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.
4. The Nation, not being prepared for Him, had crucified Him.
5. God had raised Him from the dead and had exalted Him to a place at his right hand in Heaven.
6. The crucifixion, death and resurrection of the Messiah had for their efficient cause the sins of the people; for their formal cause the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; but as for their final cause, Peter is silent. That is, Peter mentions no purpose that God had in his counsel that the Messiah should be a suffering one.
7. The Messiah had been exalted to Heaven not only because the people were unprepared for Him, but also in order to give the Nation time and opportunity to become prepared for Him.
8. When the Nation should be sufficiently prepared, the Messiah would again appear, to establish the Kingdom and destroy the unprepared remnant.
9. Preparedness for the Messiah produced an individual

and a national result: (a) For the nation it accelerated the setting up of the Messianic Kingdom with all its national blessings. (b) For the individual it effected a removal from a hostile class to a friendly class, from a class that was to be destroyed to a class that was to be blessed; it averted the destruction and secured the salvation which the coming of the Messiah brought. In other words, preparedness for the Messiah resulted to the individual in the forgiveness of sins and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit.

10. This preparedness consisted in reformation of moral and religious conduct (repentance); in naming Jesus as Messiah (faith); and in being baptized into this name. The import of this baptism was threefold; it expressed acceptance of Jesus as Messiah, it was a formal committal of self to Jesus as Messiah, and it changed the class of the baptized. It was a confession, it was a pledge, and it identified the confessing and pledging one with the disciples. He became a disciple by this very act. This was the mark that classified him outwardly.

11. This preparedness was to be produced by the disciples through their testimony and preaching, and through the confirming of their testimony by the Holy Spirit.

Such seem to have been the beliefs of the Christians during the early Petrine period.